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The Mennonites as Pathfinders in American History

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The Mennonites are not generally regarded as having exerted much influence upon the course of American history. A careful study of their past career reveals the fact, however, that they too must be reckoned among the early nation builders of our country. The Mennonites, too, were found among the early pioneers and pathfinders who blazed the way for later settlement, who braved the dangers of Indian attacks, cut down the primeval forests and broke up the virgin soil.

Among these early pioneers the Mennonites appear with the very earliest. The same generation that witnessed the founding of Jamestown in 1607 and the landing of the Pilgrims thirteen years later saw also the coming of the Mennonites. Just when the first immigrants came is not certain, but as early as 1643 a French priest, traveling among the Indians of New York, came across a small settlement of Dutch Mennonites on Manhattan Island, now the heart of New York City.

Just twenty years later in 1663 another colony of forty-one members was located on Delaware Bay by Cornelisz Peter Plockhoy, a social reformer of his day. No later trace of them has been found. The first permanent settlement was made by a group of Dutch and German families at Germantown, Pennsylvania, a suburb, now of Philadelphia, in 1683, just two years after William Penn founded the City of Brotherly Love. This settlement has the distinction of being the first colony founded by the German race in America. Here came soon after many Germans of other denominations. And here were founded sometimes in the homes of Mennonite settlers the first Lutheran, Dunkard, German Reformed and Moravian Churches of America. The little Mennonite village of Germantown thus became not only the first home of German America, but its religious cradle as well. Germantown is to the Germans of America what Jamestown and Plymouth are to the English. In the past much has been made of the Mayflower Pilgrims and the religious and political principles which they imported with them. Practically nothing has been heard in America of the little band of religious exiles who came over in the Concord a half century later, with religious and political principles in many respects similar, but in other respects far more nearly in accord with the spirit of present America than were those of the Mayflower passengers. But the Germans of America are rapidly becoming conscious of themselves, and of their glorious share in the building of the nation. They,

too, are pointing to their Germantown as proudly as the New Englanders are pointing to their Plymouth. This interest in the past will continue and as it does the little band of pioneers who landed in Germantown in 1683 will be given a more prominent place among those who planted the first colonies along the Atlantic sea board. Then Mennonite will be as familiar a household word among the American Germans as is the word Pilgrim among descendants of the English race.

Soon after the founding of Germantown a group of Mennonites from the Palatinate made the first white settlement in 1710 in what is now historic Lancaster County. Here again the Mennonites were in the very vanguard of advancing civilization. This was at the time the western outpost of Pennsylvania settlements. Lancaster County because of its central location has become one of the most historical counties in the state. Lancaster City during the Revolutionary War was one of the leading towns in the Middle colonies. For a short time after the Continental Congress had been driven out of Philadelphia by the discontented and unpaid soldiers it served as the home of the Congress, and later it was seriously considered as the permanent capital for the Federal union.

In the westward expansion, too, of the American people across the Alleghenies and from the mountain ranges of Maryland and Virginia the Mennonites appeared among the earliest pioneers.

The first white man to settle in the Shenandoah Valley was a Mennonite from Lancaster County, Abraham Strickler by name, who located here in 1729, while the Indian still roamed at will through its forests, and paddled his canoe over the muddy waters of the stream which gave the valley its name.

The Mennonites being highly endowed with the German spirit of thrift had a nose for the most fertile lands and so they were always found in the most productive regions. The line of settlements followed up the river courses, and the frontier line was gradually pushed back toward the setting sun along the fertile valleys. Even before the Revolutionary War the Appalachian Ranges had been scaled by these hardy pioneers. In 1772 John Graybill, a Mennonite from Lancaster County ascended the yellow current of the Juniata and located along the Mahantango, in what is now Snyder Co., the first settler of the region. Even earlier, in 1767, Christian Blauch, had crossed the mountains and had pitched his tent near the head waters of the Ohio in what is now Somerset Co., before the public lands of that region had been placed on the market to the public.

Into the northwest territory, too, the Mennonites came early. Martin Landis, in 1798, together with

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group of neighbors from Lancaster Co., floated down the Ohio past Marietta, the earliest town in Ohio, founded only ten years before, then up the Hocking River as far as what is now Fairfield County where a few years later the first Mennonite Church in Ohio was organized.

In Indiana Mennonites were found in 1835 and in Illinois even earlier, in 1831, when a group of immigrants direct from the Fatherland located in what is now Tazewell County along the banks of the Illinois just nine years after the first log cabin in that part of the state had been set up. A little to the north along the Partridge Creek two years later this little group of people organized the first church of any denomination in what is now Woodford Co., and according to the secretary of the German Society of Illinois, the first church organized by German immigrants in the state.

A few years later they crossed the Mississippi into Iowa and then Missouri. And still the process of settling new lands is going on. Throughout the West wherever new lands are opened up for settlement there the Mennonite is among the first to put up a log-cabin or sod-shanty and among the first to organize pioneer churches.

It is not only in the characters of early settlers that Mennonites are entitled to the title of pathfinders, but also in the enunciation of religious and political principles which at one time were new in America, but have now become old.

They were the first Separatists on this side of the Atlantic. The founders of Plymouth were not Separatists in the true sense of the word. Religious toleration and separation of the church and state were not part of their creed after they became firmly established on the New England Coast, with the possible exception of Roger Williams who espoused the Faith of the Baptists about the same time that the Mennonites appeared in New York, the latter were the original exponents in America of absolute religious liberty.

The Mennonites were the first of the peace sects in the New World, as well as the first, if not indeed the mother of the peace denominations in the old world.

To the same religious society also must be given the credit for voicing the first protest on record in America against the institution of slavery. Cornelisz Plockhoy, the founder of the Mennonite Colony on the lower Delaware in 1663 forbade slavery in his settlement hardly a generation after the first slaves were brought to America by a Dutch vessel. But to another group of Mennonites is usually given the honor of writing the first public protest against the holding of slaves in this country. This is the well known Germantown protest of 1688. Although this group of four comprised by one Pietist, two Quakers and one Mennonite, yet the protest must really be considered a Mennonite document, or at any rate to the Mennonites must be given the credit for the protest. The two Quakers

were proselytes from the Mennonite faith and owed their abhorrence of slavery to their early Mennonite training and German blood. It must be remembered too that the Quakers at this time still held slaves, but the Mennonites did not.

The same Plockhoy who in 1663 forbade the use of slaves in his colony, also bears the distinction of being the first social reformer in America if not indeed one of the very earliest advocates in the modern world of communism.

In all these lines of progress Mennonites have been pathfinders, blazing the way through the wilderness of bigotry, superstition, and intolerance into the bright sunlight of political and religious toleration. They may well be called the first prophets in America of perfect soul liberty.

Dedication of the Woman's Hall

The new Woman's Hall will be dedicated and given a name on Wednesday, February 10th. The Board of Trustees will meet on that day also. The following program for the day has been provided for:

10:30 A. M. Chapel

1:00 P. M. Meeting of Board of Trustees

2:00 P. M. Address by Dr. John T. Stone

3:00 P. M. Public Reception at Girls' Hall

4:00 P. M. Dedication of New Hall for girls

Music - - - Quartet

Scripture Reading

Prayer

Address—Dr. John Timothy Stone

Address—Member of Board of Trustees
from Central Illinois

The Dedication—President S. K. Mosiman

Prayer—J. F. Lehmann, President of Board
of Trustees

Alma Mater

5:30 P. M. Dinner at Hall for Members of
Board of Trustees and Invited
Guests

7:30 P. M. Lecture by Dr. Stone at First
Mennonite Church

Summer School

The next number of the Bulletin will contain the announcements for the summer school which will consist of two six week terms, the first beginning May 10th; the second beginning June 21st. Students interested in summer work can secure a copy of the Bulletin by addressing

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Bluffton, Ohio.

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Booster Meeting

The chapel hour and the hour following on January 26th was given over to a "booster" meeting at which both Faculty and students participated. President Mosiman presided and spoke in behalf of the Faculty. "The faculty," he said, "is a credit to the institution and compares favorably with those of many institutions more pretentious than Bluffton College. Dean Byers spoke on the relation of the College to Ohio colleges. Although a new institution Bluffton has been recognized by the colleges and universities of the state and of other states as doing strong and efficient work. The largest universities in the land are glad to give students of Bluffton full credit for any work done in the College. Professor Hirschler gave an inspiring talk on the cultural, social and economic value of a college education. The Bluffton spirit was discussed by Professor G. A. Lehmann in his usually happy manner.

Mr. Schlegel, whom the College has learned to regard as one of her faithful and loyal boosters, spoke enthusiastically on the part the student body can do in promoting the best interests of the school. He was followed by Miss Streid, who gave an excellent talk on the special contribution Bluffton has to make to its student body. Miss Alice Mueller, one of the Seniors, who spent two years in the University of Berne, Switzerland, drew some interesting and instructive comparisons between Bluffton and Berne. Professor Langenwalter, dean of the Seminary, was also present at the meeting but his talk was postponed to the following day in order that he might be given more time than could then be taken. The meeting was closed by a short talk by Professor Smith on advertising the school. He said "The success and growth of Bluffton College depends not only on a good faculty

and adequate equipment but more upon a loyal and enthusiastic student body. The school is judged by its product. It therefore behooves each student when he goes home to behave himself well, to speak well of the school and especially to be the direct cause of influencing at least one new student to come to Bluffton. If each student did that the attendance would at the least be doubled for next year." The meeting closed with the Alma Mater song. The students went out of chapel that morning with a more devoted loyalty than ever to Bluffton College and its ideals.

The Bible Term

As we go to press we are in the midst of our special Bible term. Each year these special terms are growing more interesting and are playing a larger part in the work of the College. Twenty special students have registered for the course, from Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Ohio. In addition to several new courses by members of the regular faculty we have thus far been favored by a number of special lectures by prominent christian workers.

Rev. M. C. Lehman, a missionary from Central India, gave five illustrated lectures on the religious, economic and political conditions of India. He also spoke to the students at chapel and to the Student Volunteers. His lectures were greatly appreciated by those who heard him. Miss Nora Lambert, a missionary of the Mennonite Brethren church who was forced to return from Turkey because of the war, gave several instructive discussions of the war conditions in Turkey.

During the past week (Jan. 20—24) Dr. J. P. Landis, President of Bonebrake Seminary at Dayton, Ohio, gave two lectures each day before the student body on various subjects vital to the religious life of young men and women. Dr. Landis was greatly appreciated by the students and others who had the pleasure of hearing him, and we hope that he may return to us again some time in the future.

At present (Jan. 25—Jan. 29) Rev. J. H. Lang-



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enwalter, Dean of the Seminary, at present studying at Hartford, Connecticut, is delivering a series of ten lectures, five under the general head of "The Fundamentals for Christian Workers" and five on the subject "Seeing God". Rev. Langenwalter, who is a thorough scholar and pleasing speaker, is delivering an interesting series of lectures. He will move his family to Bluffton next June and will have active charge of the Seminary the coming year.

The first week in February Dr. John Timothy Stone of Chicago, one on the strongest preachers in the country, will give eight lectures on the general subject "Constructive Life Studies in the New Testament." Dr. Stone is regarded as a great inspirational preacher and Bluffton is to be congratulated in securing him for these lectures.

All of these special features together with the courses offered by the regular members of the faculty make this special term one of great interest to those fortunate enough to take advantage of it. A larger number of christian workers in the Mennonite church should take advantage of these courses.

The Student Volunteers

Of course we have a student Volunteer Band. A college would not be complete without it. We are five in number and are studying "Decisive Hour in Christian Missions" by John R. Mott. We have interesting and instructive meetings very ably led by Professor Berky.

The Student Volunteer Movement is world wide and we are proud to belong to such an organization. Thousands of students situated in all parts of the world thus join not only in studying about missions but it is "their purpose if God permits to become

foreign missionaries." It is true, one can prepare to be a foreign missionary without joining the Student Volunteer Band but the very thought of such a vast Christian arm, having the same purpose adds vigor to the work. With the watchword "The evangelization of the world in this generation" and with Him as our captain we expect to spread His kingdom not only in this locality but in other countries as well.—Witmarsum.

College News

The College Quartette participated in the recent inaugural of Governor Willis at Columbus.

The College Faculty and students were grieved to hear of the death of the wife of Senator Peter Jansen, of Nebraska; member of the Board of Trustees. Senator Jansen will be present at the Board meeting February 10th and while here will deliver a lecture in the Assembly Hall on "Russia."

Maxwell Kratz, of Philadelphia, while attending a recent meeting of the executive committee gave a most interesting and inspiring address to the student body at Chapel.

The Quartette with Miss Watson and Miss Bogart who were so well received by large audiences in their recent tour through Pennsylvania are planning a similar trip during the Easter vacation through Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota.

Professor Byers attended a meeting of Ohio College Teachers of Pedagogy at Wooster January 16 for the purpose of organizing the Teachers of Pedagogy of the State.

Delegates of the Young Womens Christian Association from Defiance, Findlay and Ada met with the local organization January 16-17 in a district conference. The young women all report a most helpful conference. A second meeting of a similar nature will be held next year at Defiance.